



News Release

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Media Contact:

Kevin Condra

Violence & Injury Prevention Program

(o) 801-538-6183 (m) 801-560-2778

Utah Teens Still Not Buckling Up

Car Crashes Cost Lives and Millions of Dollars in Treatment

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Motor vehicle crashes continue to be the leading cause of death for teens in Utah. Wearing a seatbelt is one of the best ways to decrease injuries and deaths in motor vehicle crashes, yet from 2000-2004, only 33% of vehicle occupants 15-19 years old killed in traffic crashes in Utah were restrained.

“Teen drivers represented only 7% of the licensed drivers in Utah in 2005, yet they were involved in 27% of all motor vehicle crashes and 18% of all fatal crashes,” said Gary Mower, spokesperson for the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Violence and Injury Prevention Program.

Each year, motor vehicle crashes account for an average of 40 deaths, 330 hospitalizations, and 5,400 emergency department visits for Utah teens ages 15-19. These teen crashes also result in \$13 million each year in hospital and emergency department treatment costs.

In 2006 the UDOH and all 12 local health departments began a coordinated statewide campaign to increase teen seatbelt use. As part of this campaign, staff conducted seatbelt observation studies in targeted communities across the state. The studies show that only 67% of teens buckled up, compared with the overall state rate of 89%. Overall seatbelt use was higher in urban counties at 73% than in rural counties at 62%.

Teens cite many reasons for not buckling up, including: forgetting; it’s “uncool”; peer pressure; they’re uncomfortable; traveling only a short distance; and a feeling of invincibility. If during 2000-2004, all vehicle occupants in Utah ages 15-19 had worn seatbelts, an estimated 58 teens wouldn’t have lost their lives.

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Recently, Utah's Teen Driving Task Force, which brings together driver license officials, emergency responders, hospitals, law enforcement, public health, public safety, school officials, lawmakers and transportation officials, created a toolkit for use in Utah high schools. The toolkit is designed to provide information and tools needed to conduct educational interventions in high schools and local communities.

"It is only when all Utahns fully realize the dangers on the road and work together to help teens stay safe on the road that we will see the number of deaths and injuries drop," said Mower.

UDOH recommendations to increase teen seatbelt use include:

- Increase enforcement of existing seatbelt use laws
- Implement policies at high schools making parking privileges contingent on student seatbelt use, maintaining a clean driving record, and/or attending a safe driving presentation
- Continue to improve Utah's Graduated Driver License requirements for beginning drivers
- Expand education campaigns targeting drivers ages 15-19 years
- Increase parental oversight of teens to supplement formal driver education training.

For more information on teen driving safety tips or to see the 2006 Seat Belt Observation results, visit <http://www.health.utah.gov/vipp/motorVehicleSafety/overview.html>.

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